DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 794 CG 005 205

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TITLE	Self-Perceptions of Students Enrolled in An Experimental Elementary School.
INSTITUTION	American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C.; Florida Univ., Gainesville.
PUB DATE	2 Mar 70
NOTE	8p.; Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Convention, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 2-6, 1970
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.50
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement, Child Development, *Educational Environment, *Elementary School Students, Innovation, *Self Concept, *Self Esteem, *Self Evaluation, Ungraded Elementary Programs

ABSTRACT

The study explores the impact of an innovative, learn-teaching, completely ungraded elementary school on the professed self-esteem of students in that school. The experimental school was heavily oriented toward a humanistic approach to education and stressed success experiences for all children, elimination of academic failure and yearly detention, and maximum freedom for exploration. A neighboring elementary school with conventional grade levels and self-contained classrooms, was selected for comparison. Two hypotheses were tested: (1) Students enrolled in the experimental school will evidence greater self-esteem than students enrolled in the comparison school, and (2) as grade level increases, so will measured differences in self-esteem between the two groups of students. 25 self-referent statements worded for children from ages eight through ten were tested on subjects from the comparison school and the innovation school. The mean scores by grade and school and analysis of variance for experimental and control groups verified the hypotheses. The study also indicated that prolonged exposure to the innovative school environment had a positive influence on the professed self-esteem of children from ages eight to twelve. (author/MC)

ED037794

SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN AN EXPERIMENTAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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For generations wise teachers have sensed the significant relationship between a student's concept of himself and his performance in school. They believed that students who feel good about themselves and their abilities are those who are most likely to succeed. Conversely, it appeared that those who see themselves and their abilities in a negative fashion usually fail to achieve. In recent years a number of studies have supported this judgment that academic success or failure is deeply rooted in self-attitudes.

Brookover (1967) concluded from his extensive research on self image and achievement that the assumption of human ability as being the most important factor in achievement is questionable, and that student attitudes limit the level of achievement in school. Other studies by Fink (1962), Bledsoe (1967), Campbell (1967) and Irwin (1967) have emphasized the relationship between self-image and school success. Judging by the available evidence, there appears to be a persistent relationship between self-perceptions and academic achievement. An unexplored aspect of this relationship is the influence of the school atmosphere on the self-perceptions of students.

Traditionally, the child is expected to adjust to the school environment. Each student is expected to compete for the rewards given through

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obedience and scholarship. To insure this process, the school dispenses rewards and punishments, successes and failures, approvals, and disapprovals, pleasant and unpleasant experiences, on a massive scale. The school stands ready with grades and grade-levels, report-cards and honor rolls, continuous competition and evaluation, plus a host of other methods to mold the child to meet the school's expectations. There is evidence (Morse, 1964) to suggest that the typical school, in the process of shaping the child's behavior, increases his negative feelings about himself.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the impact of an innovative, team-teaching, completely ungraded elementary school on the professed self-esteem of students in that school. The school selected is an experiemental school in Northern Florida. Its physical plant was specifically designed to fit a curriculum geared to team-teaching and ungraded curriculum. It is heavily oriented toward a humanistic approach to education, stressing success experiences for all children, elimination of academic failure and yearly detention, and maximum freedom for exploration.

Objectives of the school are to provide continual regrouping for individual differences without attaching a stigma of failure or placing a child outside his chronological-age peer group, to permit students to participate in setting their own learning goals and evaluating their own progress, and to provide closer coordination of teachers, parents, and students in planning the educational program.

A neighboring elementary school was selected for comparison purposes. This comparison school is traditional in design and in curriculum, with conventional grade levels and self-contained classrooms. In the judgment

of the investigators, it would be considered a better-than-average elementary school in plant, teaching resources, and quality of administrative and teaching staff.

PROBLEM:

Specifically, the following two hypotheses were made:

1. Students enrolled in the experimental school will evidence greater self-esteem than students enrolled in the comparison school.

2. As grade level increases, so will measured differences in self-esteem between the two groups of students.

SUBJECTS:

Ss for the study were students enrolled in the upper four grades of two neighboring elementary schools in North Florida. The two schools are comparable on the variables of size and location and both draw their students from the same socio-economic area.

Innovative school subjects: Ss were 414 students enrolled in "Quads" 3, 4, 5, & 6 of the innovative school. These Ss are of comparable age and grade-level to students in grades 3 through 6 in a conventional school.

Comparison school subjects: Ss were the 525 students enrolled in grades 3 through 6 in the comparison elementary school.

PROCEDURE:

The total population of 939 students, ages 8 through 12, in grades 3 through 6 in the comparison school and in Quads 3 through 6 in the innovation school were administered the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory developed by Stanley Coopersmith of the University of California, Davis.

This inventory was especially developed for the research reported in The antecedents of self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967). It consists of twenty-five self-referent statements worded for use with children ages 8 to 10. Each item is scored to indicate positive or negative self-esteem, with a maximum score of 25 and a minimum score of 0.

RESULTS:

The mean score for students in each school at each grade level were obtained (Table 1). A two-way analysis of variance was performed with school as one source of variance and grade level as another. Tsao's (1946) method of equalizing cell size was employed, and the results are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1

Mean Scores by Grade and School
(Adjusted)

	Grade				School
	3	4	5	6	
Experimental	15.36	15.03	15.01	16.58	15.49
Comparison	15.70	14.59	13.94	13.95	14.54
Mean for Grade	15.53	14.81	14.48	15.26	15.02

The first hypothesis of this study was that students enrolled in the innovative elementary school would evidence greater self-esteem than students enrolled in the comparison school. This hypothesis was confirmed.

Results indicate that over the four year span of ages reflected in the study there was a highly significant difference between the scores for the two groups, with those students in the innovative school scoring almost a full point above the comparison group of students.

TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance for Experimental and Control Groups

Source	df	MS	F
School (A)	1	210.99	8.84**
Grade (B)	3	51.30	2.15
A X B	3	91.31	3.91*
Error	931	23.88	

*p .01.
**p .001.

A second hypothesis of the study was that as grade level increases, so would the differences in self esteem between the students in the two schools. This hypothesis was also confirmed. Students in the experimental school evidenced relative stability in self-esteem to Quad 5, then showed a marked increase in mean self-esteem score at Quad 6. On the other hand, students in the comparison school showed a steady decrease in mean self-esteem scores to grade 5, then stabilized at that level. (See Figure 1).

DISCUSSION:

The general findings of this study indicate that students in a

humanistically oriented elementary school evidence more favorable self-esteem than students in a comparable, but traditionally-oriented elementary school. Furthermore, although there was no control for an individual student's period of exposure to the experimental school, the data suggests that prolonged exposure to the innovative school environment does have a positive influence on the professed self-esteem of children from ages 8 to 12.

Judging by Table 1, there are factors which cause a decrease in self-esteem for students in grade 4 and possibly grade 5 in the comparison school. By contrast, if the same factors hold for the students in the experimental school, it appears that the school provides an ameliorating effect to grade 5 and a directly positive effect by grade 6.

Two possible explanations are offered here. One is that there are factors external to the school environment (maturation states, etc.) which effect students in both the experimental and comparison schools, but that factors associated with the innovative school tend to mediate the severity of these factors. The second is that factors associated with the comparison school are detrimentally influencing the self-esteem scores of students in that school.

Continuing research needs to be accomplished for a comparative analysis with other types of innovative schools such as the middle school, open school, and related arrangements in order to obtain additional information on the influence of experimental school patterns on the self-images of students.

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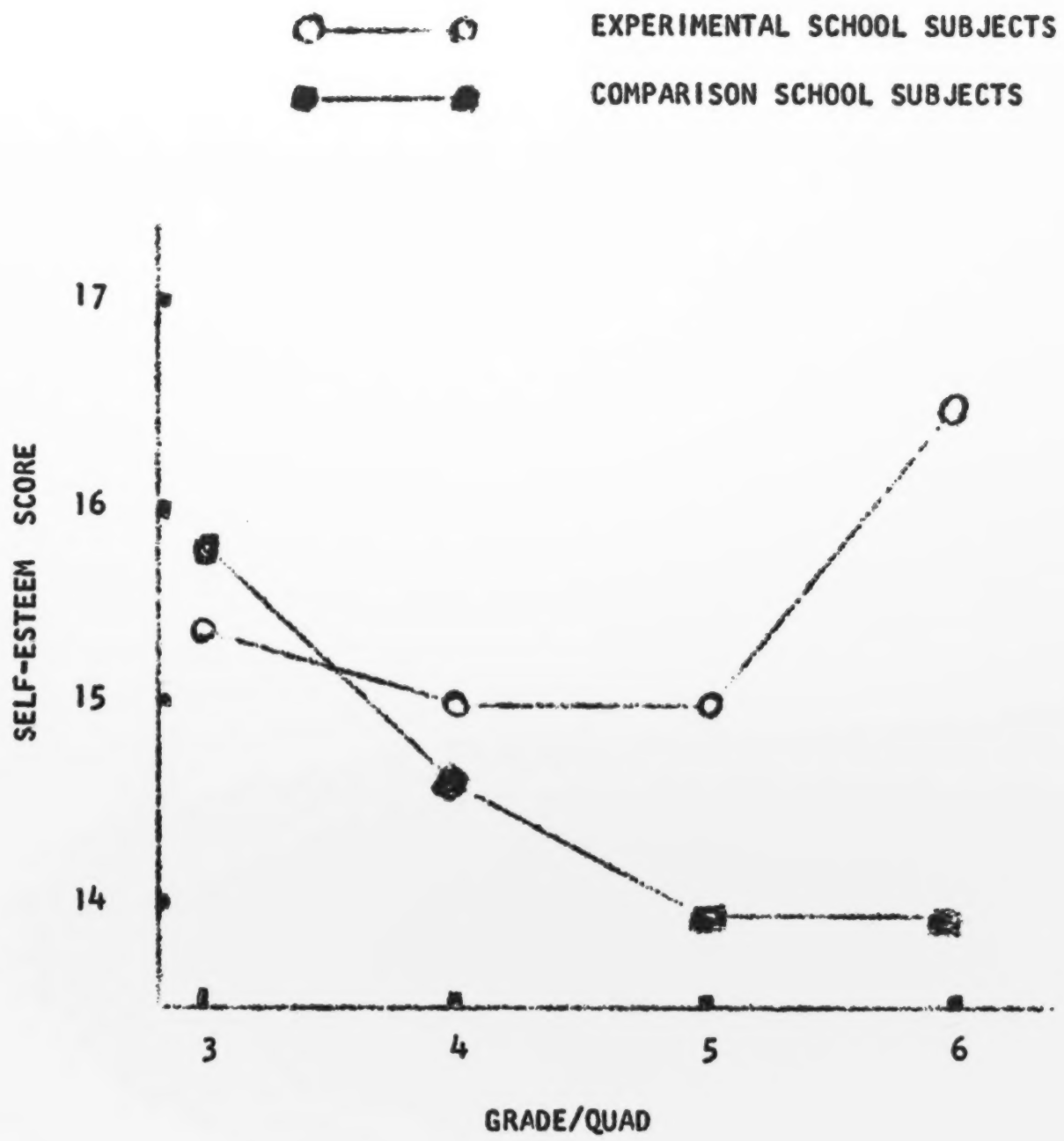
EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOL SUBJECTS
COMPARISON SCHOOL SUBJECTS
SELF-ESTEEM SCORE
17
16
15
14
3
4
5
6
GRADE/QUAD